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Helping Stamp Out Voter Fraud in Texas

By Greg Abbott
Attorney General of Texas

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In Texas, an **epidemic of voter fraud** is harming the electoral process and it's time we rooted it out.

Of course, voter fraud is no newcomer to the Lone Star State. Six decades ago, the votes "found" in Jim Wells County's infamous Ballot Box 13 helped Lyndon Johnson squeak into the U.S. Senate. Maybe none quite so dramatic, but other instances of "election irregularities" on both sides of the political aisle have plagued Texas since that 1948 primary.

And the fraud continues. Just since last summer, my office has been involved in several voter fraud cases across the state. Last month, three people, including a Texarkana City Council member, were indicted in Bowie County for illegally handling mail-in ballots for seniors and other voters during the November 2004 general elections.

In Reeves County, the mother of a **March** 2004 primary candidate for sheriff and another woman were indicted in January for illegally possessing and transporting the election ballots of several voters.

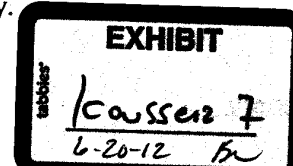
In Nueces County, four women allegedly targeted elderly voters during last year's local school board elections, going door-to-door soliciting votes and then taking ballots and carrier envelopes to the post office.

A Hardeman County commissioner pleaded guilty to illegally collecting mail-in ballots during the 2004 elections that put him in office.

And in Bee County, a Beeville resident pleaded guilty to mailing an absentee ballot in the name of her deceased mother during the November 2004 elections.

At first glance, these might seem like isolated events in far-flung towns. Step back, though, and the picture looks just as sinister as it did 60 years ago. For example, Texas has long been a haven for paid political operatives who target seniors and the disabled to handle their mail-in ballots for them. Many of the cases referred to my office by the Secretary of State fall into this category.

Exhibit 30



The fact is, voter fraud allegations are surfacing in communities from the Rio Grande to the Red River, from the Pecos to the Piney Woods. For too long, Texas has turned a blind eye to these crimes, thinking everyone does it, it is too hard to prosecute, it's not really a serious crime, it's always taken place, or some other excuse. The reality is that voter fraud is occurring on a large scale when viewed statewide and, consequently, the election process is significantly impacted.

To fight this problem, I asked my Special Investigations Unit (SIU) to work with police departments, sheriff's offices, and district and county attorneys to identify, investigate and prosecute various types of voter fraud offenses.

Officers from the SIU, working through a \$1.5 million grant from the Governor's office, will visit key counties across the state to conduct voter fraud training. Included among these counties are 14 where my office has previously investigated or prosecuted alleged election code violations. In addition to the ones mentioned above, the list includes Comal, Floyd, Harris, Hidalgo, Jim Wells, Parker, Robertson, Tarrant and Waller counties.

SIU officers are also visiting 30 other Texas counties with populations of at least 100,000. Together, these 44 counties contain more than three-quarters of the eligible registered voters in the state.

With more law enforcement officers and prosecutors on the alert, those who would commit fraud will think twice before manipulating a disabled voter or casting a ballot from the grave. If they do it anyway, let this be their notice that we will come after them.

We must do all we can to ensure the validity of our elections. Voter fraud strikes at the heart of our democratic process, and it must stop.

POINTS TO REMEMBER

Fighting Voter Fraud

Voter fraud is an epidemic in Texas.

Just since last summer, the Attorney General has been involved in voter fraud cases in Bowie, Reeves, Nueces, Hardeman and Bee counties.

The Attorney General is visiting 44 counties to help local law enforcement and prosecutors identify, investigate and prosecute voter fraud.

To report voter fraud:
Office of the Attorney General
(800) 252-8011

Information on this and other topics is available on the Attorney General's website at www.oag.state.tx.us.

Guard Against Credit Card Abuse: Check Your Receipts

By Greg Abbott